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Mandatory Review

Case # NLJ 00-233 29 October 1968

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103

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable Walt W. Rostow
Special Assistant to the President

The Honorable Dean Rusk
Secretary of State

SUBJECT: Presidential Views Concerning the
Bombing Halt and the Paris Talks

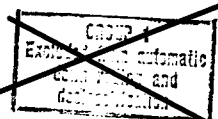
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1. [REDACTED]

2. Between 23 and 25 October 1968, President Nguyen Van Thieu continued to hold discussions with a number of government officials concerning a bombing halt and the Paris talks. Among others, Thieu spoke with Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky, the Prime Minister, Thieu's Special Assistant Nguyen Phu Duc, the Interior and Foreign Ministers, possibly Ambassador Bui Diem, and the Chairmen of the Upper and Lower Houses.

3. While speaking with the Legislative Chairmen, the President said he had told the Americans that he had instructed several people to contact Hanoi to determine if Hanoi felt the time was propitious to engage in talks. If the DRV does not feel the time right, the Americans had been informed that the Paris talks as well as the fighting in Vietnam would continue as is. However, if Hanoi judges the occasion right, Hanoi must then talk directly to Saigon to resolve the issues. It is imperative though, that Hanoi be serious about wanting to engage in talks. Thieu added parenthetically that if Hanoi would not agree to talks with the GVN Ambassador, Thieu would be willing to dispatch a GVN Cabinet Minister to handle the discussions. If the DRV is serious, the two sides could sit down and discuss the future of Vietnam, the question of peace, or any and all issues that either side cared to bring up.

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4. The President continued, then if Hanoi "tells me to recognize the NLF, I would be willing to make that sacrifice. However, if Hanoi demands a coalition government, I would say that is unacceptable. If Hanoi asks to return to nationalist activities, I would say OK."

5. Thieu said that he was willing to see the talks drag on for months or even a year, as long as NVN was serious about the talks. They should not be used for bickering or propaganda purposes, Thieu explained, and once the talks commence, the North Vietnamese "will realize that I am serious". Thieu reiterated that it did not matter if the NLF was included in the NVN delegation. However, he would never let NVN tell the GVN to talk with the NLF.

6. Thieu was obviously concerned that NVN was guaranteeing nothing in return for a bombing halt. He stated he had told the Americans that reciprocity was the most important issue. In Thieu's opinion, the best reciprocal act would be for Hanoi to begin talks with the GVN, rather than a military de-escalation or troop withdrawal from the DMZ.

7. He was also concerned that the U.S. Government wished to do something "dramatic" in order to help Humphrey on 5 November. The inclusion of the NLF at Paris would aid Humphrey, said Thieu, but the benefits are short-range. Thieu told Vice President Ky on 25 October that he was afraid the U.S. would force the GVN to deal with the NLF. He observed, however, that the U.S. was caught between the DRV and the GVN positions on the status of the NLF at a conference.

8. Ky said he felt Thieu should propose that a three-way conference be convened including the GVN, U.S. and DRV. Thieu responded that the Americans had told him that Hanoi may refer to a three-way conference between the DRV, the U.S. and the NLF. Thieu felt, however, that if the DRV would not accept the inclusion of the NLF within the DRV delegation, then Hanoi was not yet ready to engage in serious talks.

9. The President also mentioned that he was having difficulty with the Americans in that they were urging him not to speak to the press or make public statements to avoid leaks on the US/GVN talks. Thieu noted that he was trying to convey the impression that he was a man of peace who would die, not for the world, but for the people of SVN.